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## Obama Appointment of Siddiqui to Agricultural Post is an Absolute Disaster for Organic Food Proponents

by Max Goldberg

You probably heard that over the weekend President Obama recess-appointed 15 people to different government posts in order to bypass Senate approval hearings. What may have escaped you is that Islam Siddiqui was appointed as the Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

If you care about organic food and the environment, this move should outrage you.

A lifelong pesticide lobbyist and GMO advocate, Siddiqui's confirmation in the Senate was opposed by more than 80 environmental, small-farm and consumer groups.

Siddiqui is vice president of science and regulatory affairs at CropLife America, a trade group of biotech and pesticide companies, which is essentially a front organization for Monsanto. CropLife has the proud distinction of many great accomplishments including fighting the initiatives of banning GMO food in California, claiming that pesticides positively impact endangered species, lobbying the Bush administration for human – and child – testing of pesticides and writing a letter to Michelle Obama urging her to use pesticides in the organic garden at the White House.

Previously, Siddiqui spent numerous years in the Clinton administration working in different marketing and regulatory programs at the Department of Agriculture. Since 2004, he has served on a Commerce Department's advisory committee that advises the U.S. Trade Representative and Commerce Secretary on matters related to chemical and pharmaceutical products.

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, it was under Siddiqui's watch at the USDA when the first organic labeling standards allowed "sewage-sludge fertilizer, genetically-modified food and irradiation." These are known as the Big 3 in the organic world and ultimately were never permitted after very vigorous protest. Furthermore, Siddiqui "derided the European Union for banning hormone-treated beef and vowed to pressure the European Union to allow more genetically-modified crops."

Since Siddiqui's nomination was recess-appointed, it means that the job is his. The Senate still has to approve him if he wants the permanent position but that may not take place until the end of 2010.

Under the Bush and Clinton administrations, a majority of the recess-appointments converted to permanent appointments. So needless to say, there is a strong likelihood that Siddiqui will be pushing his pro-GMO and pro-pesticide agenda to countries all around the world for the next few years.

As someone who cares deeply about organic food, I find Siddiqui's appointment to be completely and utterly disheartening. It also brings up two thoughts.

First, it is quite obvious that Monsanto's tentacles have a very tight grip on this administration. Very, very tight.

Second, does Michelle Obama have absolutely no influence with the President? Here is a woman who plants an organic garden on her lawn, brings Alice Waters of Chez Panisse to the White House and speaks publicly about kids eating healthier. Yet, her husband appoints someone virulently anti-organic to a very important, food-related government post.

Does she not realize that study after study shows that organic food is more nutritious than conventional food?

How can she allow this? Or, does she simply not pay attention?

I just don't get it. I must not be that smart so if someone could explain it to me, I would sure appreciate it.